



SA Federation for
Mental Health

ANXIETY DISORDERS

SOCIAL PHOBIA (SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER)

What it is:

Social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder, is characterized by an intense fear or anxiety of social situations in which the individual feels they may be criticised or scrutinized. The individual fears that in such social situations they will be negatively judged as being for example, boring, crazy, stupid or ugly. The individual may also fear appearing anxious or shy by blushing or stumbling over their words, or they may fear offending others and being rejected as a result. The fear of being judged is usually out of proportion to the risk of negative evaluation, or the consequences of such negative judgments are not as severe as the individual perceives them to be. Social phobia may lead to avoidance of the social situations that cause anxiety, and can lead to serious impairment in functionality if the individual tries to avoid school or work, or turns down social gatherings or opportunities as a result of their anxiety.

Common symptoms:

1. Extreme fear or anxiety about social situations in which the individual may be exposed to judgment by others, for example meeting new people, eating or drinking in front of others, or giving a speech in front of others
2. The individual fears that they will act in an embarrassing way that exposes their fear or anxiety, such as blushing or stammering
3. Social interactions almost always cause anxiety. In children this may manifest as crying, tantrums, or failing to speak in social situations
4. Social situations are avoided, even to the detriment of the individual. For example missing work or school.
5. The fear or anxiety is out of proportion with the level of actual threat posed by the situation
6. The fear or anxiety causes impairments in the individual's ability to function daily

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*



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Causes:

There are a number of factors that can contribute to the development of social phobia. Temperamental factors include behavioural inhibition and fear of negative evaluation. Environmental factors such as childhood maltreatment and adversity can also be risk factors for the development of the disorder. There also appears to be a genetic and physiological component, as social anxiety disorder can be hereditary and may be more common in first degree relatives of an individual who has social anxiety disorder.

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